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The Greek & Roman God(esse)s

A quick overview by Thomas Palmer

Gods

APOLLO-Also called Phoebus, the bright one. Identified with the sun. Said to be the most powerful of the Gods. Son of Zeus and Leto. Born on Delos, taken North and raised by the hyperboreans, he went to Delphi and killed the dragon Python, guardian of the oracle of Themis, but a ravager of the countryside.

Tall, handsome, outstanding in word and deed, he was the god of ever-renewed youth, archetype of virile beauty and masculine virtue. He was also known as a seducer & extremely arrogant. Talented in music, inventor of the lyre, he was the inspiration of poets and soothsayers. His oracles were expressed in verse.

He could cure illness and banish evil. He was a doctor who knew the purification rites and was invoked against plague. His image was set at dangerous places for protection (Lighting the ways) Nothing escaped his vision (light of day).

ARIES (MARS)-Son of Hera, born without male assistance. He was a supreme fighter, loved battle and cared little about issues, switching sides without scruple. He delighted in massacres.

He was god of war, not victory, and was thoughtless about winning, only fighting. Was on occasion disarmed by Athena, Goddess of restraint and forethought, to keep him from interfering in battles that did not concern him.

He was prolific in love, but also a rapist. He was run by his passions.

CRONOS (SATURN)- Son of Uranus (Heaven) and Gaea (Earth). Gaea, worn out by numerous pregnancies, requested to be free of this burden, so Cronos (Saturn) took up a sickle and cut off his father's testicles. His wife was Rhea, and he fathered Hestia, Demeter, Hera, Hades, Poseidon and Zeus. Was eventually deposed by Zeus.

His festivals, the Saturnalia, were a time of liberation and freedom for all and got pretty wild. They were celebrated from Dec. 17th until the new year. Saturn is the archetype for "father time".

DIONYSUS- Son of Zeus and Semele. His escort was satyrs and marginally sane gods. He did not respect laws or customs, loved disguises, wild screaming, licentious dances and wild places. He was a drunken god with no home, living in the wild and eating raw meat. He encouraged excesses of all kinds.

Hera hated Dionysus because of Zeus's infidelity and hounded him. She caused him to be killed by the Titans, but he was resurrected through the efforts of Athena, Zeus, Apollo, and Rhea. She drove him mad, but through Cybele he gained mastery of it. He drove many people mad for various reasons.

EROS (CUPID)- A primordial god, contemporary of Chaos, who existed before Cronos (Saturn) and Zeus. He came out of an egg that formed the earth and sky when it broke in two. He precipitated the embraces of Gaea (the Earth) and Uranus (the heavens), which resulted in the birth of Oceanus, Tethys, Coeus, and Cronos (Saturn). The Earth and heavens were so tightly embraced that none of the children could rise towards the light until Cronos (Saturn) castrated his father.

Cupid was associated with Aphrodite, who moderated his power. Where he was desire, instinct and violent sex, she was grace, tenderness and sweet pleasure.

Cupid made people lose their reason and paralyzed their wills, even inspiring Zeus to capricious sexual desires.

As Eros he is said to be the child of Porus (Expedience) and Penia (Poverty). Like Penia, he was said to always be in search of something, and like Porus, he always found a means of attaining his aims.

FAUNUS- A Roman God, Son of Circe and Jupiter. Protector of the Roman peoples, he lived on Palatine Hill in Rome. His oracle was given in nightmares. Lupercalia was his festival, during which his priests ran through the streets with leather straps and struck any women they met with them to bestow health and fertility. The women were said to strip themselves to be better targets. He reproduced himself in the satyrs.

HADES (PLUTO)- Son of Cronos (Saturn), brother of Zeus and Poseidon. When the world was divided between the three brothers, the underworld and hell fell to Hades, while Zeus took the heavens and Poseidon the seas. He had a helmet that made him invisible. He ruled the dead, and forbade his subjects to leave his domain. He desired Persephone, but Zeus forbade the marriage. He then kidnapped her.

HEPHAESTUS (VULCAN)- Son of Zeus and Hera. He was lame, either because his mother, startled by his ugliness, dropped him, or because Zeus, angry that he took his mother's side in a dispute, threw him from Olympos. He dwelled among mortals and became the god of black-smithing and artistic metal work. He made a golden throne that imprisoned any who sat in it, and gave it to Hera to avenge himself for his fall from Olympos.

HERMES (MERCURY)- Son of Zeus and the nymph Maia. He stole some of Apollo's cattle shortly after his birth and concealed them, sacrificing two to the Olympian Gods. This theft won him recognition as a God himself. When Apollo discovered the theft and Hermes was tried, his defense was so skillful and spirited that Zeus laughed and ruled that there should be a friendly settlement between the brothers.

Hermes was God of the spoken word and oratory and was the intermediary between the Gods and men. Also the God of commerce and contracts, where language must be precise to convey the correct meaning.

JANUS- ROMAN- The Two faced God. he was God of beginnings and presided over new undertakings, gateways and initiations. he was revered as the first king of Rome and made order reign. His temple was left open in wartime so the God could act, but was closed in peace.

THE LARES- Roman- Twin children of Mercury by the rape of Lara. They protected the land. Were symbolized by two boys and a dog.

PAN- Half man, half goat, with horns on his brow and lust in his eyes. Son of Hermes and a daughter of the Dryops, he was the God of pastoral regions and wilderness. Special friend of shepherds, he guided and protected them from afar. Protector of all wild things and places. His pipes had an aphrodisiac effect on those who heard them and induced mating.

Pan was a lecher and a drunk who constantly pursued nymphs who would flee in terror. Caves rang with their cries when he caught them. He was famous for his rages, where he attacked anyone who got in his way. His irrational behavior led people to flee him in "panic." He was dangerous when he took possession of a being. The possessed, or panoleptic, took on his bearing and would wander in the wild, laugh madly, or throw themselves on others for sex without respect to gender, or have epileptic fits.

POSEIDON (NEPTUNE)- Son of Cronos (Saturn) and Rhea, he is represented wielding a trident and being pulled by monsters in a chariot. After Zeus's victory over Cronos (Saturn), the young gods, who preferred life on earth, divided the various domains of earth. Poseidon chose the seas. He represented the hidden forces of germination and death. Together with his wife Amphitrite, he had powerful ties with Gaea, the Earth, mother of the Titans. As subterranean Gods, they shook the world from inside.

Poseidon caused earthquakes when he made love to his wife. The mystery isle of Atlanta belonged to Poseidon. Poseidon could provoke storms, set fire to rocks on shore and create springs of water. He had many children, most wicked and violent, like the Cyclops of the Odyssey.

PRIAPUS- A small god with a penis of immense size. Son of Zeus and Aphrodite, he was deformed by Hera in revenge. Aphrodite abandoned him in fear that she would be ridiculed for her ugly child. He began as a symbol of fertility, but of no significance. Although he was oversized, he was impotent. He seemed to fail at everything he tried. He was compared to an ass and ridiculed. He lent his name to the disease priapism, an incurable illness where the penis remains painfully erect but incapable of ejaculation. Ended up as an obscure gnome.

QUIRINUS- A Roman warrior god originally, he became a god who watched over the well being of the community, opposite to his former nature. Called an apparition of Romulus the founder of Rome.

ZEUS (JUPITER)- Son of Cronos (Saturn) and Rhea. He defeated Cronos (Saturn) in a ten year battle and then divided the realms with his brothers by lot, getting the heavens for his own. He was ruler and judge, the arbiter of disputes among Gods and men. His decisions were just and well balanced, showing no favoritism. He had several wives and many lover's, earning the title "all father" or "father god". His infidelity caused much strife on Olympos and in the world through he raging of his wife, Hera.

Goddesses

APHRODITE (VENUS)- Daughter of Zeus and Dione according to Homer. 'The Woman Born Of The Waves' according to Hesiod, born of the foam impregnated by the sexual organs of Uranus, which Cronos (Saturn) had severed and thrown into the sea. Plato identifies these as two separate Aphrodites. One Urania, the daughter of Uranus was goddess of pure love. The other, called Pandemos, (Root of pandemonium?) was the Goddess of 'common' love. She married Hephaestus, but was unfaithful with Aries.

Aries was caught and humiliated. Aphrodite fled in shame to Cyprus, and there took Thrace as lover, resulting in the birth of Eros (Love), Anteros (Love in return), Deimos and Phobos (Terror and Fear). She also was a lover of Adonis, a human shepherd named Anchises who fathered Aneas, of Hermes and of Dionysus who fathered Priapus. She was known for jealousy. She made Eos (Dawn) fall in love with Orion in spite for her seduction of Aries. She punished all who did not succumb to her. A beauty competition between Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite was proposed by Eris (Discord) with the prize being a golden apple. It was judged by the human Paris. All the Goddesses offered him bribes to win.

Aphrodite offered Helen, most beautiful of all Humans. She won and thus caused the Trojan War. Eros was the primordial god of instinct. When Aphrodite appeared he adapted himself and joined forces with her. At this time the sexes became distinct. Aphrodite's kingdom was the place of desire. Young girls were said to pass from the place of Artemis (chastity and games) to the place of Aphrodite, where they become women. Considered by some to be

an affliction or madness that women must bear. She represents female lust and passion, and demonstrates its potential for destructive effect. Young girls gave their virginity to the Goddess by living in her temples and offering themselves to passing strangers.

ARTEMIS (DIANA)-Daughter of Zeus and Leto. The huntress, she is seen as the forever young goddess. She is proud of her shapeliness and keeps her virginity to protect it. She was a warrior, joining Apollo to kill Python and other exploits. Anyone who offended her or tried to win her virginity paid dearly. They were killed, transformed, or mutilated. She defended modesty and punished illicit love and excesses. She avenged rape. She also took out her anger on those virgins who gave in to love. She did not mind marriage, but when a virgin married she was to give up all the things of childhood, toys and dolls, locks of hair, etc., leaving them on her altar.

ATHENA (MINERVA)- Daughter of Zeus and Metis. Metis was swallowed by Zeus, and when it was time for Diana's birth, he had Hephaestus crack open his skull and she came forth in full armor shouting a war cry. Also a virgin Goddess, she lived among men without fear due to her warrior's skills. She was the protectress of Odysseus and other men. She was a warrior who used strategy, ambush, cunning, and magic rather than brute force. Her shield bore the head of a gorgon and she paralyzed her adversaries and made her companions invincible. She was against excess, both in war and every day life. She taught men to control their savagery and to tame nature. Was the initiator of all skills. Taught Pandora to weave, trained horses and invented the chariot. She was the patroness of blacksmiths and carpenters. She built the first ship and the boat of the Argonauts.

CYBELE- Was born as Agditis, a hermaphrodite monster, from a stone fertilized by Zeus. The Gods decided to mutilate him(?) and made the Goddess Cybele from him. Her love for Attis, a human shepherd, drove him insane and he castrated himself for her. Her priests were eunuchs dressed as women. It is from the temple of Cybele that the reference in the Wiccan Charge of the Goddess to "At mine Altars, the youths of Lacedmmon in Sparta made due sacrifice.", comes.

DEMETER (CERES)- Daughter of Cronos (Saturn) and Rhea, the Goddess of corn and grain. Demeter bore Persephone. She renounced her duties as goddess and began a fast and went into exile from Olympos when her daughter was abducted into the underworld until her daughter should be returned to her. She caused the spread of the knowledge of the cultivation of corn.

During her exile the earth became barren until Zeus demanded that Hades return Persephone. She had eaten from a pomegranate, however, and was forever bound to the underworld. As a compromise, she was allowed to rise up into the world with the first growth of spring and return to the underworld at seed sowing in fall. And so the Earth is barren in the winter, while Demeter mourns, and becomes fruitful again when Persephone is released. Demeter made herself known to the children of Eleusis, who raised her a temple and instituted the Eleusinian mysteries. In Sept.-Oct., the candidates for initiation purified themselves in the sea, then processed down the sacred path from Athens to Eleusis. The rites remain secret, but involve a search for a mill for grinding corn, and a spiritual experience. During the rites, men women and slaves were all treated as equal.

ERINYES, THE- Alecto, Tisiphone, and Megaara. They were born from drops of blood that fell from Uranus's severed Penis, and did not recognize the authority of the gods of Olympos. They hounded and tortured their victims, driving them mad. Also called the Eumenides, The Good Ones, to divert their wrath. Assimilated by the Romans as the Furies. They were implacable and demanded punishment for every murder. To them murder was a stain. The murderer had to be banished and driven mad before purification could occur. They were blind and carried out their punishments indefinitely.

HARPIES- Greek genii/spirits- Daughters of Thaumes and Electra: Nicotho or swift-footed, Ocypete or swift of flight, and Celaeno, the dark one. Were either women with wings or birds with the heads of women. Called the 'hounds of Zeus' and seized children and souls. Skillful at torture, they could pester a victim into madness.

HERA (JUNO)- Daughter of Cronos (Saturn) and Rhea brought up by Oceanus and Tethys. Married Zeus. It was claimed that each year Hera regained her virginity by bathing in the spring of Canathus. According to some traditions Hephaestus, Aries, and Hebe (Youth) were conceived by her alone without male assistance. As Zeus' legitimate wife, her fury at his infidelities was boundless, and she took vengeance on his lovers and any progeny of the affair without distinction. Zeus was often reduced to hiding or disguising his children to protect them.

HESTIA/VESTA- Daughter of Cronos (Saturn) and Rhea. Goddess of the hearth, she had the privilege of retaining her virginity forever. Her symbol was the fire, which was never allowed to go out. The young bride and newborn child were presented to her and she was invoked before each meal. Her temple in Rome was served by the young vestal virgins.

MOERAE (PARCAE)- The Three Fates. Atropos, Clotho, Lachesis, daughters of Zeus and Themis. The first spins a thread symbolizing birth. The second unravels it, symbolizing life's processes, and the third cuts it, symbolizing death. They too were blind and ruled destiny. They were also symbols of a limit which could not be overstepped. Were connected to their sisters, the furies, who punished crime.

MUSES- Nine daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne (Memory). Calliope ruled epic poetry, Clio ruled history, Polyhymnia mime, Euterpe the flute, Terpsichore dance, Erarto lyric art, Melpomene tragedy, Thalia comedy and Urania astronomy. They delighted the Gods and inspired poets. The Muses created what they sang about. By praising the gods, they completed their glory, by boasting of valiant warriors, they wrote their names in history.

They were celebrated by the Pythagoreans as the keepers of the knowledge of harmony.

NEMESIS- Daughter and Night. Ruled over the distribution of wealth, looked after balance, took revenge on arrogance and punished excess, including excessive happiness, riches and power. Moderation in all things was her creed.

NYMPHS- Daughter of Zeus and usually part of a greater god(esses) entourage. Not immortal, though long lived. Mostly lived in caves. Were dark powers whose beauty alone could lead to madness. Were seducers of many of the gods. Were considered secondary deities.

THETIS- Daughter of the old man of the sea. Very beautiful. Mother of Achilles. Saved Zeus from a plot to overthrow him and was an ally of Hera. Saved the Argonauts as they passed between the clashing rocks.

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